

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
INTERVIEW WITH NBC
MOSCOW, RUSSIA
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Q: Defense Secretary William Perry is in Russia, the first of four stops during a week-long visit to the former Soviet republics. This morning he's at our NBC news bureau in Moscow. Mr. Secretary, good morning.

A: Good afternoon. It's afternoon here in Moscow.

Q: Understood. Good afternoon.

Tops on your agenda on this trip is to continue to push for the dismantlement of former Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal. Towards that end, how much progress would you say you're making?

A: It's not just the nuclear arsenal, Brian, it's the weapons of mass destruction -- chemical weapons, biological weapons as well. We signed today an agreement which will provide a major step forward in the destruction and the cleanup of the chemical weapons. That was one major achievement.

We're moving forward on the nuclear weapons. The major achievement there was actually in January at the Summit Agreement when President Yeltsin and President Kravchuk and President Clinton all signed the so-called Trilateral Agreement. That trilateral agreement provided for the dismantling of the Ukrainian nuclear weapons.

Q: How much, if at all, have your conversations there been affected by the Aldrich Ames affair?

A: We have not discussed the Ames affair here.

Q: Not at all?

A: No.

Q: I've got to ask you...the cooperation that we continue to move on various tasks with the Russians against the backdrop of that affair, how would you characterize our relationship now with the Russians? Are we unwilling partners? Are we wary allies? Are we former enemies? How would you characterize this?

A: I would characterize it as a pragmatic partnership. We are proceeding forward on programs that are beneficial, both to Russia and to the United States. Certainly, the dismantlement of the nuclear weapons can be so characterized. The work we're doing with them in defense conversion are beneficial to both countries. Shutting down their chemical weapons and helping clean up. Those are all programs which are beneficial to both countries, and they're worth doing whatever happens in Russia today.

Q: Mr. Secretary are you hearing anything at all about President Yeltsin's health?

A: No. President Yeltsin is out of town. He's on a two week vacation down in southern Russia. We assume he's there to recover from the flu, is what we hear. We expect him back and functioning in another week and a half.

Q: There is a strong report, supposedly based on CIA analysis, that President Boris Yeltsin is seriously ill, suffering from cirrhosis of the liver. Is anyone there familiar with that report?

A: People have heard that report. I have seen no evidence. Nobody I've talked to has seen any evidence that that is correct, so I tend to doubt it.

Q: To your mind, how crucial is his health to the continuance of democratic reform?

A: There are many strong leaders in the government and we have a strong Parliament functioning in Russia today. So, I believe democracy is becoming institutionalized in Russia today. It's not dependent on any one person. On the other hand, it is still fragile, and it is important... We believe in the United States it's important to continue to support the democratic movement in Russia.

Q: Let's talk about North Korea, if we could. As you know, the North Koreans have blocked international inspection of their nuclear facilities. Given the threat that the government of Kim Il Sung poses, what would you like to see happen next?

A: I think the IAEA is going to make their complete report to the United Nations. I'm very interested in getting the full details of that report. What we've read already, though, suggests that North Korea has fallen short on providing for the full inspection that the IAEA considered necessary. We consider that a very serious matter. We are now consulting with our allies, particularly South Korea and Japan, about what our next step should be.

Q: If we can't convince our allies to act with us in concert, do you consider the threat sufficient to be willing to act unilaterally?

A: I have a difficult time imagining any actions on North Korea that we would do without having a full partnership with South Korea. We have 37,000 troops stationed in South Korea, we have an alliance with them. So no, anything we do relative to North Korea will have to be done in full partnership with South Korea, and certainly with consultation with Japan and other allies as well.

Q: Unless the North Koreans comply with nuclear inspections, are you inclined to be willing to move up the schedule of joint military exercises with the South Koreans?

A: I think there are several next steps to be considered. Further diplomatic steps. Certainly a consideration of sanctions. That would be for the United Nations to determine because sanctions can only be effective if they're done on a multinational basis. We should certainly also consider, and are considering, improving the quality and the quantity of the forces which we have in Korea.

Q: Is that to say that you would favor deploying advanced weapon systems in South Korea, as a way of showing the seriousness with which we view the non-compliance?

A: I think any move towards new weapons in Korea, first of all, would have to be done in full consultation with South Korea; and secondly, they would not be so much done as a signal but, simply, to improve the quality of our forces there, if we think the risk of a war has increased.

Q: Can we afford, Mr. Secretary, to do nothing militarily while they argue, in diplomatic channels, until the North Koreans build the nuclear arsenal they clearly are aiming at?

A: We have to take firm and vigorous action to stop the development of nuclear weapons in North Korea. We are a long way from having to consider military action. There are many things we can do in the diplomatic, there are other things we can do in the area of sanctions before we have to be faced with any consideration of military action.

Q: Mr. Secretary, thank you very much. Have a good weekend, sir.

A: Thank you.

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